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ABSTRACT

Individualized education programs (IEPs) for 54 urban special education students (5-18 years old) were rated according to required IEP components and student demographic data. Analysis indicated that IEPs developed by speech pathologists were superior to other IEPs in terms of accordance with federal guidelines. The major shortcoming in IEP documentation was a statement of annual goals and short term objectives. (CL)

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Context Evaluation of Individualized Educational Programs in an Urban School District

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INTRODUCTION

One of the more recent growing trends in special education has been directed toward the initiation, expansion and improvement of programs for educating the handicapped child. On November 28, 1975, President Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act into Public Law 94-142. The goal of the full-service model as outlined in P.L. 94-142 is to identify, locate, and evaluate all handicapped children, and to establish a full-service time table.

The basic purpose of the Act is to "assure that all handicapped children have available to them a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs, to assure that children and parents' rights are protected, to assist states and localities and to assure effectiveness of efforts."[1]

Free appropriate public education has been defined as special education and related services which are at public expense, meet state education standards, and include a preschool and an individualized educational program (IEP). The development and use of Individual Education Programs increases the chance that exceptional children will have successful educational experiences (Hayes and Higgins, 1977). Utilization of IEPs recognizes the differences among students and acknowledges different rates of learning. Therefore, education can be designed on the basis of the child's needs, rather than on the basis of administrative convenience (Morrissey and Safer, 1977).

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[1]The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc., 1201 16th St., N.W. Suite 610E, Washington, D.C. 20036

The two basic components of the IEP consist of a meeting between parents and school personnel and a written document stating the Individualized Education Program. The IEP is an agreement between all parties and a statement setting forth what will be provided to the child (Weintraub, 1977).

A review of literature revealed only limited reports of studies which evaluated the quality of IEPs in an urban setting, and Project IEP, sponsored by the Bureau of Education for the Handicap, produced a needs assessment study on IEPs in four states (Penney, Morrissey, Safer, 1977; Sagstetter, Morrissey, Safer, 1977; Lewis, Morrissey, Safer, 1977; Norton, Morrissey, Safer, 1977). Anderson, Barner and Larsen (1977) found in a study of IEPs in Santa Barbara, California that significant information was frequently missing from IEP documents. Project IEP, implemented in Alabama, New Jersey, Washington and Wisconsin set up professional panels which identified the following needs after requesting the insights and perspectives of those most directly affected by the IEP process.

1. Appropriate and comprehensive pre- and in-service training on the local level.
2. Federal financial support.
3. Minimally standardized procedures in order to provide the needed flexibility on the local level.
4. Parent education programs.

The Dallas Independent School District implemented the Texas Comprehensive Special Education Program (Plan A) on a pilot basis in the fall, 1972. Plan A was an individualized, mainstream program for the handicapped. The evaluation of Plan A addressed a number of IEP related issues. Macy (1974) reported that educational plan documents generally reflected good instruc-

tional expertise in the second year of Plan A implementation, but that the writing of instructional objectives was an area in need of improvement. A later Plan A evaluation study found that plan documents were generally complete in terms of required information but that the writing of instructional objectives continued to need improvement (Macy and Carter, 1976). Anderson, Barnes, and Larsen (1977) also reported similar need for improvement in the technical quality of instructional objectives.

Research and evaluation to date has also shown that the curricular scope of instructional objectives specified in IEPs is generally much less comprehensive than would be desired. Anderson, Barnes, and Larsen (1977) reported that 75 percent of sampled objectives pertained only to math and language arts. Turner and Macy (1978) reviewed almost 5,000 objectives specified for 1,502 students and found that about 60 percent of the objectives dealt with math and language arts. Turner and Macy also observed that less than five percent of sampled objectives were in the area of perceptual/motor skills, which is inconsistent with today's P.L.94-142 mandate for physical education in the IEP.

The current study was conducted as a context evaluation in terms of the CIPP model developed by Stufflebeam. The method of context evaluation provides baseline information, identifies unmet needs and unused opportunities, and diagnoses problems that prevent needs from being met. Since the federal law now mandates that every special education student must have an individualized program, this study was designed to find the current state of the art in the Dallas Independent School District in terms of IEP implementation. This study focused on the written document of IEPs in terms of technical quality.

According to guidelines defined by P.L. 94-142 the written document must include:

1. A statement of the child's present level of educational performance.
2. A statement of annual goals.
3. A statement of short term instructional objectives.
4. A statement of the specific educational services to be provided.
5. The extent to which the child will be able to participate in regular education programs.
6. The projected date for initiation and anticipated duration of such services.
7. Appropriate objective criteria for determining whether objectives are being achieved.

PROCEDURE

The information reported was a result of a survey of IEP documents written between August and November of the 1977-78 school year by the special education faculty and the speech pathologists. The basic procedure was to review sampled IEP documents as contained in the District's central administrative special education files and to complete a checklist surveying the completeness of sampled documents. The study considered students receiving itinerant speech services and students in special education classes as separate populations.

Instruments

A checklist was developed for rating sampled IEPs (see Appendix A), which was devised to include the IEP components described above as well as

student demographic data such as age, race, and gender, etc. Special educators in the District typically used one of several educational plan forms to document the IEP. These forms were a continuation of the educational plan form used in the Texas Comprehensive Special Education Program (termed Plan A), which was implemented several years prior to P.L. 94-142. Plan A mandated that every child have an individualized educational plan, and the District was in the process of revising and updating these forms to meet 94-142 guidelines. Thus, the IEP checklist used in this study was general enough to survey data from several types of IEP documents.

Sample

The sample was randomly drawn from the population of regular campus special education students, but was stratified on primary handicap. The sample of students in the special education classes (N=54) included those having the following primary handicaps: minimal brain injury (N=11), educable mentally retarded (N=21), trainable mentally retarded (N=9), and language learning disabled (N=13). Age varied from five to eighteen years for these students. The speech students sampled (N=48) ranged in age from three to twelve years. The sample, illustrated in the following table, was generally representative of gender and ethnic strata in the District's special education program.

Table 1

Student Demographic Data

		Other Handicapped		Speech Handicapped	
		N	%	N	P
Gender	Male	43	80%	28	58%
	Female	11	20%	20	42%
Ethnicity	Anglo	17	31%	22	46%
	Negro	31	57%	12	25%
	Mexican-American	6	11%	12	25%
	American Indian	0	--	1	2%
	Oriental	0	--	1	2%
	Other	0	--	0	--
Total		54		48	

RESULTS

Evaluation of Total IEP Document

Sampled IEP data indicated that the majority of speech pathologists met the guidelines defined by P.L. 94-142; whereas, the plans written for other handicapped children were far less in accordance with federal guidelines. Out of the latter group, 24 percent of the plans were complete according to guidelines, compared to 83 percent of the speech plans. The following table summarizes the results of both samples, according to the specific categories.

Table II

IEP Summary

	Other Handicapped[a]		Speech Handicapped[b]	
	N	%	N	%
Present Level of Educational Performance	50	93%	46	96%
Annual Goals	24	44%	48	100%
One or More Stated Objectives	54	100%	48	100%
Complete Short Term Instructional Objectives	18	33%	42	88%
Educational Services	47	87%	47	98%
Participation in Regular Education Programs	45	83%	48	100%
Initiation and Duration of Services	33	61%	42	88%
Completion Criteria for Objectives	39	72%	48	100%

[a] sample N=54

[b] sample N=48

A statement of annual goals and short-term objectives was the main deficiency in the documents written for the various handicapped students as seen in Table II. Annual goals were written 44 percent of the time. While all IEPs contained at least one or more objectives, only one out of three IEPs (33%) contained technically complete objectives. Thirty-nine percent of the objectives included an appropriate achievement criteria. The projected date for initiation and duration of services was present in 33 percent of sampled IEPs.

The other three items required by P.L. 94-142 were completed on these same plans. The form in use had space provided to declare strengths and weaknesses of the student, which the evaluator interpreted as the child's baseline behavior. This statement was listed 93 percent of the time. Eighty-three percent of the IEPs included the number of hours per week outside the classroom. Finally, the public law requests a "statement of the specific educational services to be provided" which the evaluator felt was contained in the area of the form designated for "materials and activities." Educational services were stated 87 percent of the time.

Every Individualized Education Program written for a speech handicapped student included at least one annual goal and all the goals were comprised of corresponding short-term objectives. Eighty-eight percent of the sampled objectives included the essential characteristics. Criteria for objectives was listed in all the documents and the objective attainment date was contained in 88 percent of the IEPs. Both the strengths and weaknesses were recorded with 96 percent accuracy on the documents. Again, every form contained the number of hours spent outside the regular classroom, and only one form lacked specifying educational services producing a 98 percent rating

in this category. Although the parents' signature was not explicitly required by P.L. 94-142 and no space was provided for it on the form, 44 percent of the speech students' parents had either signed the form, 44 percent of the speech students' parents had either signed the form or it was indicated where the signature could be found within the child's folder.

Evaluation of IEP Objectives

The technical quality of IEP objectives was studied to see if objectives included an observable task, appropriate criteria level, an observational method for determining mastery, and an attainment date. The first objective written on each form was selected to use in this study. Both the special education teachers and speech pathologists averaged writing six objectives per child. Table III summarizes the quality of the sampled objectives in terms of the four identifiable items they should include.

Table III

IEP Summary of Objectives

Group	Stated all 4 items		Stated Observable Task		Stated Criteria Level		Stated Observational Method		Stated Attainment Date	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Other Handicapped	18	33%	49	91%	39	72%	31	57%	33	61%
Speech Handicapped	42	88%	48	100%	48	100%	48	100%	42	88%

As mentioned earlier, 33.3 percent of the objectives for the various handicapped students included all four parts. The observational method was

included in 57 percent of the statements, the attainment date was stated in 61 percent of the objectives, 72 percent of the time the criteria level was mentioned, and in 91 percent of them, the observational task was explained. From a different angle 33.3 percent lacked one item, 16.6 percent - two items, 15 percent - three items, and one objective (2 percent of the total) lacked all four characteristics.

A variety of objectives were studied in the above mentioned sample varying from language arts, science, and math subjects, to job objectives oriented to students in vocational programs. The math and language arts objectives totalled 61 percent of the sample. The latter subject included such topics as reading, writing and spelling and combinations of the three. The other objectives dealt with the following subjects:

Job objectives	15%
Motor abilities	4%
Perception	4%
Science	4%
Social Studies	2%
Speech	2%
Other	9%

Out of the 48 sampled speech objectives, 42 incorporated all four necessary items, totalling an 88 percent accuracy rate as seen in Table III. The remaining 12 percent of the objectives lacked one item which was the attainment date.

DISCUSSION

One of the major findings of the study was the superiority of IEP documents developed by speech pathologists. One explanation for this may be the nature of service delivery in speech pathology as well as the preservice in speech pathology as well as the preservice professional training received at the university level. Indications are that speech preparatory

course work places much greater emphasis on instructional objectives in the planning and delivery of speech services.

The current study supported previous research (Anderson, Barner, and Larsen, 1977) in finding that the average number of objectives per IEP was six and that objectives primarily dealt with math and language arts. Both studies found that the area of writing instructional objectives was in need of much improvement, and the current study revealed difficulties in developing long range goals in concert with short-term objectives, which was the major IEP deficiency observed.

The results of the study underlined the need for in-service staff development training in terms of IEP procedures and documentation. This need has been consistently identified in previous studies.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to do a context evaluation of individualized educational programs (IEPs) in the Dallas Independent School District. The IEP sample (N=102) was randomly drawn from the population of regular campus special education students, but was stratified on primary handicap. The students sampled had gender and ethnic representation which corresponded to the district's special education gender and ethnic totals. A checklist was developed for rating IEPs on the guidelines defined by Public Law 94-142, and it was devised to include the components of P.L. 94-142 as well as student demographic data.

The current study was designed to find out how successfully or unsuccessfully the implementation of individualized programs for special education students has been conducted up to the present time in the Dallas Independent School District. Sampled IEP data indicated that the majority of speech pathologists met the guidelines defined by P.L. 94-142; whereas, the IEP documents written for other handicapped children were far less in accordance with federal guidelines. Out of the latter group, 24 percent of the IEPs were complete according to guidelines, compared to 83 percent of the speech plans. The major shortcoming in IEP documentation was the difficulty in developing short-term objectives in concert with annual goals. Sixty-one percent of the sampled objectives written for students (other than speech students) dealt with math and language arts.

The results of this study underlined the need for IEP staff development. Specifically, in-service training should center on writing goals and consequent short-term objectives. Current data have also shown that the curricular scope of instructional objectives should be more comprehensive and inclusive

of other areas of child development besides math and language arts. The results of the evaluation also suggested that speech pathologists might be a valuable staff development resource, at least in terms of technical quality of objectives. Consideration should also be given to the potential contribution of speech pathologists in developing objectives relative to annual goals.

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Appendix A

CHECKLIST

NAME: LAST	FIRST	MI.	DATE PLAN WRITTEN	PRIMARY HANDICAP	STUDENT ID #	
						SEX
						RACE
						AGE
						WHICH FORM?
						STRENGTHS?
						WEAKNESSES?
						ANNUAL GOALS: ANY LISTED?
						ANNUAL GOALS: CORRESPONDING OBJECTIVES
						OBJECTIVES: TYPE?
						OBJECTIVES: OBSERVABLE TASK
						OBJECTIVES: PERFORMANCE LEVEL
						OBJECTIVES: OBSERVATIONAL METHOD
						OBJECTIVES: ATTAINMENT DATE
						OBJECTIVES: # OF OBJECTIVE
						TIME SPENT IN REGULAR ED:
						ADAPTIVE ED #
						PARENTS SIGNATURE?
						EDUCATIONAL SERVICES?